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Dismantling the ground-to-ground component

Working paper submitted by France

Elimination of the ground-to-ground component

France's ground-to-ground component consisted of mobile short-range missiles, together with strategic missiles located on the Plateau d'Albion.

As a result of changes in the strategic context, on 22 February 1996 France announced its decision to forego the ground-to-ground component of its nuclear deterrent.

Stages in the phase-out of the ground-to-ground component

1991-1992 decisions

- Early withdrawal of Pluton short-range missiles
- Production of Hadès short-range missiles ended and decision taken not to deploy them
- S45 strategic ground-to-ground missile programme (intended to replace the Plateau d'Albion S3D missiles) terminated

1996 decisions

- Decommissioning of Plateau d'Albion ground-to-ground missiles and closure of the site
- Final removal of the Hadès weapons system

The dismantling of the 30 Hadès mobile short-range missiles was completed in 1997, the dismantling of the 18 S3D strategic missiles in 1998.

Dismantling of Plateau d'Albion (1996-1998)

Some major constraints, namely security, respect for the environment, site conversion and consequences for the local community and economy, had to be taken into account in dismantling Plateau d'Albion, a complex operation that began on 16 September 1996.

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A large workforce and specialized equipment were used for this very specific worksite, which extended over almost 800 hectares. Dismantling the 18 launch areas required:

- Over 63,000 working hours
- The removal of more than 630 tons of material.

Each stage of the dismantling process was highly technical: for example, extracting each missile warhead required 162 different operations. After the nuclear warheads and the detonation device had been removed, the destruction of the missiles involved disposing of not only the missile bodies but also the fuel.

All sites, equipment and facilities that had come into contact with nuclear material were subject to non-contamination inspection and certification.

The denuclearization of Plateau d'Albion, at the rate of one missile a month, was completed on 25 February 1998. The total cost of dismantling the site was about 75 million euros.

Towards a treaty banning short- and intermediate-range ground-to-ground missiles

In keeping with the steps taken at the national level with the elimination of its national ground-to-ground component, France is engaged in vigorous efforts at the multilateral level to achieve disarmament. The President of the Republic has, for example, proposed the opening of negotiations on a treaty banning short- and intermediate-range ground-to-ground missiles (Cherbourg speech, 21 March 2008).

France's proposal has been incorporated within the disarmament action plan which was endorsed by the 27 heads of State and Government at the Council of the European Union in December 2008 and which the European Union is proposing with a view to the 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference.

The European Union proposes the opening of consultations on a treaty banning short- and intermediate-range ground-to-ground missiles.